

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9784

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 6551

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LE, SY, PLO

SUBJECT: SYRIA DOWNPLAYS ITS ROLE IN SEPT 28 MTN CAMPAIGN

1. SUMMARY:

SYRIA PORTRAYING ITSELF AS PLAYING ROLE SUPPORTIVE
OF SAIQA AND LEBANESE ARMY VANGUARD IN SEPT 28 CAMPAIGN.
ALTHOUGH NUMBER OF METN VILLAGES HAVE REPORTEDLY ALREADY
RETURNED TO CHRISTIAN CONTROL, IT NOT YET CLEAR WHETHER
FULL-SCALE METN OFFENSIVE UNDERWAY OF KST ANOTHER SYRIA
CHRISTIAN THREAT OF FULL-SCALE ACTION. END SUMMARY
WPVVEVENING SEPT 28 SYRIAN RADIO BROADCAST STATEMENT
ATTRIBUTED

TO SAIQA ("GENERAL COMMAND OF THE ORGANIZATION
OF THE POPULAR LIBERATION VANGUARD"); WHICH DESCRIBED THAT DAY'S
"MOPPING-UP OPERATIONZ IN SOUTHERN METN AS HAVING BEEN
CARRIED OUT BY SAIQA FORCES IN COORDINATION WITH "VANGUARD
OF THE LEBANESE ARAB ARMY, ASSWTED BY A UNIT OF THE
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SYRIAN ARAB FORCES IN THE BEKAA." STATEMENT

UNDERPLAYS ROLE IN SYRIAN REGULAR UNITS IN CONTRAST TO PUBLICITY OVER BEIRUT PRO-COUP RADIO W DCH FEATURED SYRIANS AS KEY ELEMENT IN THE ATTACK. SAIQA STATEMENT DESCRIBED YESTERDAY'S OPERATION AS "/INCENTIVE" FOR PEOPLE TO COME TO THEIR SENSES AND PRESERVE THE REVOLUTION, THEREBY HINTING THAT SEPT WI OFFENSIVE MAY HAVE BEEN INTENDED AS A SIGNAL THAT THE PALESTINIAN AND LEFTIST FORCES OCCUPYING THE METN STILL HAD TIME TO WITHDRAW UNILATERALLY AND AVOID FURTHER CONFLICT. STATEMENT CRITICIZED DAMAGE DONE BY JUMBLATT TO PALESTINIAN CAUSE.

3. SAIQA ALSO CLAIMED DEFECTION OF SOME 120 FIGHTERS FROM THE PLA'S AYN JALOUT BRIGADE. THIS CLAIM WAS COUNTERED BY ASSERTION OF THE PRO-COUP RADIO THAT ABOUT A COMPANY OF SYRIAN REGULARS, OF ALL RANKS, HAD DEFECTED YESTERDAY TO THE JOINT NATIONALIST FORCES. WE HAVE NOTED NUMBER OF CLAIMS BY LEFTIST/PALESTINIAN SOURCES T OT SYRIANS SUFFERED A TANK LOSS YESTERDAY OF BETWEEN 20 AND 30 VEHICLES IN HAMMANA AREA.

4. DAO RECONNAISSANCE OF DAMASCUS-BEIRUT ROAD LAST NIGHT REVEALED NEGATIVE MILITARY MOVEMENT. USUALLY RELIABLE SYRIAN SOURCE INFORMS US THAT THREE REGULAR BATTALIONS HAD ENTERED LEBANON LAST WEEK AND THAT TWO BATTALIONS OF RIFAT AL'ASAD'S DEFENSE FORCES ARE NOW PREPARING TO DEPART FOR LEBANON.

5. CEASE-FIRE:

BBC STATED THAT SARKIS HAS REPORTEDLY CALLED FOR A NATION-WIDE CEASE-FIRE. FBIS, QUOTING PLO RADIO, REPORTS SARG HAS PROPOSED TO FATAH BOTH A CEASE-FIRE AND CONVENING OF A SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN MEETING CONCEBNING THE FIGHTING IN UPPER METN. PROPOSALWLLEGEDLY XANC THR GH AKIR HAD BEEN A MEMBER OF FATAH CENTRAL COMMITTEE. LIBYAN AMBASSADOR WHO IS DAILY CONTACT WITH BU MAZIN TOLD US SEP 29 HE BELIEVES IDEA OF CEASE-FIRE WAS ABU MAZIN'S AND NOT SARG'S. HE ADDED THAT LIBYAN PRIMIN JALLUD HAD SHARPLY CRITICIZED PLO'S POOR SENSE OF TIMING LAST

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JULY AND HAD URGED PALESTINAINS TO MAKE UNILATERAL WITHDRAWAL FROM METN BEFORE THEY WERE PUSHED OUT.

6. COMMENT:

ON BASIS AVAILABLE EVIDENCE, WE ASSUME THAT SYRIAN FORCES INVOLVED IN YESTERDAY'S CAMPAIGN WERE THOSE ALREADY

IN POSITION IN LEBANON. IF THIS IS THE LONG RUMORED
OFFENSIVE BY LEBANESE CHRISTIAN SYRIAN FORCES IN THE
METN, IT HAS BEEN LAUNCHED EARLIER THAN ANTICIPATED.
LATEST PREDICTIONS WERE THAT SUCH OFFENSIVE WOULD
BEGIN AT END OF THIS WEEK IF PALESTINIANS HAD NOT BY THEN
UNILATERALLY PULLED OUT OF ALL METN. ALTHOUGH NUMBER OF
CHRISTIAN VILLAGES HAVE REPORTEDLY ALREADY RETURNED TO
CHRISTIAN CONTROL, NEXT 24 HOURS WILL SHOW WHETHER YESTER-
DAY'S ACTION WAS INTENDED MERELY AS A THREAT OF SYRO-CHRISTIAN
OVERALL DRIVE TO CLEAN OUT THE METN OR MARKED THE ACTUAL BEGINNING
OF THE CAMPAIGN. IN ANY CASE, WE DOUBT THAT SUNDAY'S
ATTACK ON SEMIRAMIS HOTEL IN DAMASCUS BY IRAQI CONTROLLED
GUERRILLAS INFLUENCED SYRIAN DECISION TO LAUNCH YESTERDAY'S
OPERATION.

7. SEPT 28 OPERATION MARKS REENTRY AS FIGHTING FORCE OF
SAIQA, WHICH WAS DISPERSED AND THOROUGHLY HUMILIATED BY FATAH
IN EARLY JUNE CONFRONTATION. MAKEUP OF THIS NEW FORCE AND ITS
LEADERSHIP CURRENTLY UNCLEAR.
MURPHY

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